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AUTHOR Kezar, Adrianna J.
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ABSTRACT

The literature on college instruction reached a peak in 1996, one reason being that this topic relates to the larger discussion about the changing role of higher education and to faculty members' changing priorities. Trends identified include the integration of technology into instruction; an emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and learning; active learning; and the outcomes and "quality" of learning. Underlying these themes is an emphasis on learning rather than on teaching. Several studies examine how the use of technology is changing the learning process, the structure of knowledge, and the nature of instruction. A limited number of articles focus on interdisciplinary programs and instruction, with the discussion usually related to technological instruction. However, one study describes an interdisciplinary program for freshmen that focuses on development of critical thinking, nonverbal communication, writing, and speaking. Many authors describe techniques for engaging students through active learning, but no consensus is seen in the literature on outcomes and quality assessment. Several studies address the issue of balancing research, teaching, and service, and studies on setting standards for exemplary teaching seem to illustrate agreement on the relative merits of good teaching. There is minimal research on how different pedagogical styles can create more inviting learning environments for different racial or gender groups. (Contains 46 references.) (JM)

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# Higher Education Trends (1997-1999): Instruction

*Adrianna J. Kezar*

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# Higher Education Trends (1997-1999)
# Instruction

**by Adrianna J Kezar**

The amount of literature on college instruction doubled in 1996. Since 1991, the percentage of literature on college instruction has been rising, reaching a peak in 1996. One reason for the rise may be that this topic relates to the larger discussion about the changing purposes of higher education in the 21st century and faculty members' changing priorities. For example, *Goals and Purposes of Higher Education in the 21st Century* (Burgen) suggests that changing world economies, politics, and social systems have an impact on the goals of higher education and colleges' and universities' delivery systems. James Fairweather's *Faculty Work and Public Trust: Restoring the Value of Teaching and Public Service in American Academic Life* explores the change in priorities among faculty roles as a result of larger societal forces, such as the rise in the need for human development rather than research and a need for applied rather than basic research.

Some notable changes will profoundly affect higher education: the demand for greater access to higher education (which can be facilitated by technology), a focus on learning rather than on teaching, an emphasis on value-added, assessment, and quality of outcomes rather than inputs, research prestige, and specialization. In essence, attempts to provide more access and to ensure specific learning outcomes are significantly affecting the delivery of information. Further, changes in the nature and structure of knowledge-that is, boundless and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary knowledge as opposed to bounded and disciplinary knowledge-are beginning to alter delivery systems.

With this larger context in mind, it is not surprising that several trends can be identified in the literature:

1. *The integration of technology into instruction, as current students have embraced technology;*
2. *An emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and learning, as students, having been introduced to it during much of their K-12 education, are familiar with the concept;*
3. *Active learning, which engages students in the learning process; and*
4. *Outcomes and "quality," as students, especially older students and parent, appreciate understanding the outcomes of learning.*

An assumption underlying these four themes is an emphasis on learning rather than on teaching; another is that these methods of instruction increase students' motivation to learn. These modes of delivery are amenable to a more diverse student body, which has not been engaged as successfully in traditional teaching methods (Bierema). Moreover, all these themes are themselves interrelated. For example, instruction in technology leads to a more active and interdisciplinary approach and facilitates assessment (Engel et al.; Windschitl).

**Technology**

The use of technology is growing and simultaneously changing the learning process, the structure of knowledge, and the nature of instruction, including curriculum development

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and assessment (Alley and Repp). Through his 1995 survey on campus computing, Kenneth Green illustrates that major gains have been made in the proportion of colleges and universities using information technology as an instructional resource. Trent Batson and Randy Bass describe how the growth in information technology is bringing hybrid forms of teaching and learning, a blurring of boundaries, different literacies, and changes in the way knowledge is constructed. Robert Dufresne et al., in "Classtalk: A Classroom Communication System for Active Learning," illustrate how using technology for instruction engages students in active learning and enhances overall communication in the classroom. Others describe student outcomes, costs, and advantages of integrating technology with specific classes or disciplines (Askew; Felix, Uschi). Research on the positive result of technology on learning continues to grow, but the research has not been accompanied by articles on the practice of integrating technology in the classroom, with the exception of *Change* magazine. This trend is exactly the opposite of other instructional trends. For example, research is limited on the impact of service learning, but considerable literature is available about integrating this instructional innovation. Moreover, more research is needed on specific ways that different technological techniques are being integrated into the classroom.

**Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning**

A limited number of articles focused on interdisciplinary programs or instruction. Usually, interdisciplinary teaching and learning is discussed in relation to technological instruction. One exception is a description of an interdisciplinary program for freshmen at Pace University in New York, which focuses on the development of critical thinking, nonverbal communication, writing, and speaking. The approach has succeeded in improving persistence and graduation rates (Brown and Salisch). Much more research on the impact of interdisciplinary instruction on learning and many more ideas about integrating this innovation into schools, colleges, and programs is needed. With the exception of the literature from Barbara Leigh on learning communities, Tinto's recent research, and some recent articles in AAHE's *Bulletin*, this topic is receiving limited attention.

**Active Learning**

Many authors describe techniques for engaging students through active learning, such as five-minute papers, group projects, satire or humor to written or oral assignments, and grid systems (Kloss; Reeves; Schwiebert). Active learning is concentrated in certain disciplines, with biology, education, social work, and other applied professional fields emphasizing the importance of experiential learning (Levin et al.). These disciplines also provide compelling arguments for why certain knowledge cannot be learned in the abstract, such as ethics (Rothstein; Swensen). Coverage of problem-based learning is also prevalent in many discipline-specific journals (Kalaian and Mullan). For example, Stephen Whittaker and Mitchell Scheiman describe didactic and problem-based teaching in optometry. Problems are organized so students learn portions of required content, building a base of knowledge while solving a succession of problems. Cases are usually presented and discussed in tutorials. Students report increased independent learning. The literature produced in previous years was mainly about research on the value of active learning; most of the literature produced in 1996 is on best practices. Thus, it appears that educators have accepted the value of this form of instruction.

Service learning is a growing trend in instruction (see "College Faculty" and "Curriculum") (Mettetal and Bryant; Zlotkowski).

**Outcomes and Quality**

Andy Reese and Mary Mobley's article, "Academic Success through Quality-managed Course Design," discusses how clearly stated objectives for a course, numerous intermediate steps to achieving objectives, immediate feedback on students' performance, and immediate corrective action (all aspects of the quality principles) lead to students' improved performance and long-term retention of knowledge. Other authors explore how assessment can enhance learning, focusing on the impact of allowing students to determine

their own motivational priorities (Elton). But there is by no means consensus on the usability of learning outcomes in college. After reviewing the literature on learning outcomes and objectives, Joanna Allan concludes that outcome statements and behavioral objectives, which indicate explicit standards of performance, are inappropriate in higher education. More research is needed in this area, because opinions and study results vary.

The literature shows a distinct movement toward a renewed emphasis on the importance of teaching. In particular, it emphasizes honoring exemplary teaching and faculty development and evaluation. The literature on making teaching a priority attempts to rebalance the faculty's role, moving from an emphasis on research so that faculty more clearly see their role in the learning equation. Viewed next to the literature on emphasizing learning, partnerships with students, and learning outcomes, however, the renewed dialogue about teaching seems somewhat contradictory. These two literatures seem like two separate cultures that need to be bridged if colleges and universities want to discuss coherently the changes in college instruction. The general public and policy makers will most likely find these trends confusing and convoluted.

**Rebalancing?**

Several authors address the issue of balancing research, teaching, and service. One study explores the extent to which this reprioritization of faculty goals has taken place. Peter Gray et al., in a project funded by the Lily Foundation, examine the relative importance of teaching and research in 187 four-year institutions. The study's respondents report that their institutions are shifting from a moderate emphasis on research to a strong emphasis on teaching; respondents also believe their institutions should shift from a balanced emphasis to a strong emphasis on teaching. This response is stronger than in the early years of the study.

Previously, the literature focused on the need to rethink the priority given to each aspect of the faculty's role (teaching, research, and service); in 1996, however, the literature suggests ways to achieve a balance or suggests how the roles can be mutually reinforcing. For example, *Teaching on Solid Ground: Using Scholarship to Improve Practice* (Menges and Weimer) illustrates the way that teaching and research can have a synergistic relationship. Others suggest that modifications in the processes of hiring or granting tenure can facilitate a greater emphasis on teaching (Cotter; Perlman and McCann). Two main strategies for initiating the rebalancing are the honoring of exemplary teaching, including departmental or campus awards or nomination to national awards and articles in the campus paper (Jenrette and Hays; Lunde and Barrett; Zahorski), and faculty development through mentoring, teaching academies, or certification programs (Chism et al.; Meyer and Penna; Smith and Walvoord). Some schools argue that awards set an example and standards for others to aspire to without the formality and additional resources of establishing certification programs or academies (Kahn).

James Fairweather suggests that support for faculty teaching is not being countered by a release from responsibilities for research; teaching is simply added on. Thus, his research questions the whole notion of whether any rebalancing is actually occurring. According to Fairweather, evidence suggests that administrative policies can affect faculty priorities in terms of socialization, redefining research, and modifying reward structures. More Research is needed in this area to determine which strategies are more effective, as campuses remain unclear about and without evidence for which strategies tend to work and in what circumstances.

**Assessing Exemplary Teaching**

A theme that evolves out of attempts to honor or develop exemplary teaching is assessment: How does one know when a teacher is exemplary? The merits of student evaluations, portfolios, student learning, peer review, and observation are all represented in the literature (Angelo; Centra; Feldman; Meyer and Penna; Richlin and Manning). Studies on setting standards for exemplary teaching illustrate that observers can agree on the relative merits of

"good" teaching (Centra; Svinicki & Menges). Robert J. Menges describes some of the common problems in honoring exemplary teaching: selection and criteria for selection, the bias toward popularity, competition versus collaboration, questionable incentives, and the use of special awards to replace continuing rewards. It would be helpful if research in this area focused on comparing methods of evaluation; individual methods tend to be tested for validity, but the research has been minimal on comparing the methods to determine which are most helpful in what contexts and for what purposes. This type of research will help campuses to design evaluation programs that meet their specific goals.

**Diversity and Instruction**

There is minimal research is minimal on the ways that different pedagogical styles can create a more inviting environment for different racial or gender groups. Although this topic has been a major one in past years and remains part of the active dialogue in K-12 circles, there appears to be less attention in the research or practice literature. This trend could be disturbing, especially as the college-age population continues to become more diverse. One project that might be of interest to states or institutions looking for a model for a comprehensive strategy to make college instruction fit the needs of a diverse student body is a book on the New Jersey Project, which, since 1986, has been pioneering the statewide transformation of the college curriculum away from the androcentric, Eurocentric canon toward an inclusive, nonsexist, nonracist, and multicultural curriculum and instruction (Friedman et al.). The emphasis on active and experiential modes of instruction is related to meeting the needs of a more diverse student body. It might be that changing styles of instruction, such as collaborative learning, experiential techniques, and learning communities, are being integrated to meet these needs, even if campuses do not state that this is the objective.

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